

8199 • *The transcendent Excellency of the
Knowledge of Christ.* 72

A
S E R M O N

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PHILIPPIANS iii. 8. first part.

W H E R E I N

The Supreme Glories of Christ are vindicated; the Incarnation of Deity is proved; and the most important Knowledge of Christ, with the superior Excellency thereof, displayed.

Published at the earnest Request of some Friends.

By J O H N H A Y D O N. *16*

of Tewkesbury, Gloucestershire

*A stone of stumbling, and rock of offence, even to them which
stumble at the word.* 1 Pet. ii. 8.

B R I S T O L :

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P R E F A C E.

WHEN the ensuing discourse was delivered from the pulpit, I had no intention to make it farther public; but as the proper divinity of Christ has been by one and another of late struck at, I thought I should act in character, as a professed servant of his, to say something in vindication thereof.

It is my opinion, that every man has a right to judge for himself in matters of religion; which liberty, I hope, will be granted to me. And I think myself happy, that whilst I cannot fall in with the sentiments of some gentlemen, I can admire those amiable virtues which adorn their moral characters.

Tewkesbury, Nov. 18,
1772.

J. H.

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PHILIPPIANS iii. 8. first part.

Yea doubteless, and I count all things but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord.

THE knowledge of Christ is the most profound, the most comfortable, and necessary knowledge in the world. It is the prime attainment, and engages the strictest enquiries of the angels in heaven: they pry into the mysteries of the incarnate God, and cannot look upon themselves as compleatly blessed, without an acquaintance with the crucified Jesus; and the adorable method of salvation by him.

The old testament saints most earnestly prayed, and diligently searched to know Christ; and the heart of St. Paul was so fixed on this delightful subject, that he determined to pour contempt on every science, when compared with the knowledge of Christ. You may see in this chapter, how fully blessed Paul gave his heart to Christ, and cast every thing away which stood betwixt him and his soul. He had enumerated many things, which were looked upon as great advantages by some, and what he once so esteemed himself, but now the scales had dropped from his eyes, and he became capable of viewing things in their true light, he considered them as loss for Christ. They pre-

prejudiced his mind against looking for salvation alone by Christ Jesus. Those things which the Jews considered as their peculiar privileges, kept them from embracing Christ, and the righteousness which is by faith; while the Gentiles, who were looked upon as miserable for want of these fancied advantages, closed in the more readily with him, because they were without them.*

In my text, the apostle with an holy elevation and fervour of soul, expresses his resolution to cleave solely to Christ, and the doctrine of salvation by him. *Yea doubtless*, I have no hesitation, you may depend upon it, that *I count*, upon a deliberate and just calculation, *all things*, Jewish privileges, and all earthly advantages; my Christian attainments, and evangelical obedience; my gaining souls to Christ, and suffering for his cause; *but loss*. I expect not to be justified by these things; they are of no value in my esteem, in regard to my acceptance with God; they are of no worth, but loss, when compared with the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord; or, an experimental acquaintance with the glories of his person, the nature and use of his offices, and the admirable sweetness of those benefits which are derived to all true believers, from the wonderful constitution of his person, and the gracious characters he is pleased to sustain, in order effectually to secure the inexpressible blessings appointed for the heirs of salvation.

What I intend to say further on these words, will be in the following method.

I. I

* Matt. xxi. 31. Rom. ix. 30, 31, 32.

I. I would give a view of some things relating to Christ, which every Christian should endeavour to be acquainted with.

II. Point out the saving knowledge of Christ; which is knowledge, attended with a special appropriation of Christ to the soul. *Christ Jesus*, says the apostle, *my Lord*.

III. Shew the superior excellencies of the knowledge of Christ. And then conclude with a few inferences.

I. I would give a view of some things relating to Christ, which every Christian should endeavour to be acquainted with.

I own there are hidden mysteries of Christ, which we have no call to enquire into; they lie infinitely beyond our utmost penetration, and are known only to Deity. Those things which are revealed in sacred writ, are the only proper objects of Christian knowledge. Too curious an enquiry into things relating to Christ, might justly receive the same check from him, as Manoah had from the angel, *Why askest thou thus after my name, seeing it is wonderful?* But I think it is our indispensable duty, to enquire into some things with respect to Christ, which, if done with piety and humility, may contribute much to our edification and comfort. In a dependance on the unerring dictates of the Spirit of Christ, and taking his word for my guide, I would therefore search a little into the nature of his stupendous and adorable person. And it appears to me, after the most unbiaſſed disquisitions into the divine will, that he is superior to the most exalted creature, and equal in dignity with him,

him, who is over all blessed for ever; I readily own my entire incapacity to know *how* this can be; yet I cannot suffer myself to disbelieve it on that account, because there are many of the *works* of God which no man was ever fully acquainted with. And if there are multitudes of inscrutable secrets in the natural world, certainly the *author* of these must be impenetrably mysterious in his nature and essence. And as it would be inexcusable folly, for a man to deny the being of those things which he cannot comprehend amongst the *productions* of divine power; one would think the human mind lost almost in insanity, when it will believe nothing of *God*, but what is plain to reason. But a man may say, I know by my senses, that many things have an existence which I am unable to account for; but I cannot by the same evidence be convinced, that supreme divinity belongs to the person of Christ. But if the old and new testament are admitted to be the genuine offspring of heaven, which they have been proved to be by many wise and learned men, it is equally certain, though we cannot explain how it is, that Jesus, who as concerning the flesh came of the fathers, is also God over all blessed for ever*.

The invisible things of Christ from the foundation of the world, are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead. We are assured by the evangelist John, and the apostle Paul, That *all things were made by him, and without him was not any thing made, that was made:*

* Rom. ix. 5.

made *: That by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers, all things were created by him and for him. From hence it is evident that the creation, visible and invisible to us, plainly declares that supreme Deity belongs to Jesus, for he that built all things must be God by nature. If without him was not any thing made that was made, he made himself, if he was a creature, which is impossible.

It is evident from scripture, that Christ is called God, the mighty God, Jehovah, and the Almighty; the several incommunicable attributes of Deity are ascribed to him, in as sublime a manner as they are to the Father. He holds together the frame of nature; by him all things consist ||, and he directs the wheels of providence. He will by his own power raise the dead, judge all accountable creatures, and fix them in their eternal abodes of happiness and misery.

More abundant proof might be given of the Deity of Christ, from the sacred oracles, but I shall only mention two passages, one out of each testament, which giving clear proof in the cause I am defending, I shall produce no more evidence here. In Isaiah we are told, that in the year king Uzziah died, Isaiah saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up §, whom the seraphim † call Jehovah, as does also Isaiah ¶; which glorious person ** sent him with a message to the Jews: Hear ye
B indeed;

* John i. 3. || Col. i. 17.

§ Isai. vi. 1. † ver. 3. ¶ ver. 5. ** ver. 8, 9.

indeed, but understand not, &c. This very passage is most certainly applied to our Lord Jesus Christ by the evangelist John *; These things said Esaias, when he saw his glory and spake of him. A testimony in any affair which concerns our fellow creatures, as plain as this, would surely be admitted; why should it not then be received as full proof of the proper Divinity of our adorable Lord Jesus?

The other clear and faithful witness to maintain the unlimited dignity of Christ, we have in Colossians †, In him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. In him, that is, Christ, dwelleth ||, perpetually resides. The Godhead, not the resemblance of God, communicated to him in any gifts which might make him the shadow of Deity, but the real Godhead. And that his Divinity might be indisputably maintained, we are assured, that all the fulness of the Godhead dwells in him bodily, that is, every incomprehensible perfection of the divine nature. I doubt not but the highest created intelligence is incapable of explaining what is here clearly revealed by the Spirit of God: But if there was not a plurality of equal persons in the undivided essence of God, or some kind of plurality or other, it is amazing that Moses, whose manifest design was to extirpate the polytheism of the heathen, should use the plural word Elohim, according to Dr. Gill, near five hundred times in his five books.

I would now proceed to shew, that Christ was really man. As some assert that he is only the shadow of a God, or a God by office;

* John xii. 39, 40, 41. † Col. ii. 9. || ver. 8.

fice ; so some in the more early days of Christianity supposed, he was not truly man, but the resemblance of a man, made in the likeness of man, but not really a man.

I know of none now, who deny that Christ was a real partaker of the human nature. We are expressly told, that he is the son of Abraham, and the son of David. That he was made of a woman, partook of flesh and blood, which had all the properties and sensations which are essential to a human body. And he had also a human soul, which was certain from its operations, affections, and expiration on the cross.

The two natures in Christ, I mean the divine and human, were united and became one person. Here I am led to treat of the incarnation of God, which is difficult to understand, and perilous to disbelieve. This amazing conjunction, doubtless, is not impossible. The supreme goodness may communicate itself, in the nearest degree of union, to the rational nature. Can any prove it impossible? I believe they cannot, however inexplicable it may be by the most capacious finite mind. The unerring word of truth informs us, that it is a real case, that the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us. He was joined to, or took into the strictest union with himself, a perfect human soul, and a pure body, formed by the power of the Highest in the womb of the virgin Mary. This wonderful person is truly called Immanuel, or God with us. One nature is derived from the fathers, the other in the same person is God over all blessed for ever*.

B 2

He

* Rom. ix. 5.

He who is the very brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person, and being omnipotent, upholds all things by the word of his power, in the very same person put away sin by the sacrifice of himself*.

The two natures in our adorable Mediator, though they constitute one person, yet they are not blended or confounded. Each nature retains its own essential properties distinct. The human nature gives a kind of relation to the divine, which it had not before the union commenced, and the divine exalts the human to a vast degree of eminence and dignity; it becomes its peculiar support, and which where it resides, may be faintly resembled by the abode of the Shekinah, or manifestation of the presence and glory of God in the holy of holies§.

The two natures in our exalted Mediator, are so far from being compounded or mixed, that a perpetual line of distinction lies between them. He had certainly two understandings, one omniscient, by which he knew all things||, and another limited, whereby in some respects he was on a level with other intelligent creatures¶. He had two wills, one that proved him to be the Lord God omnipotent‡, and another which discovered sinless frailty**, *Not as I will, but as thou wilt.*

This union which I have been treating of, is not a matter of mere speculation, but absolutely

* Heb. i. 3.

§ Though the divine perfections, by reason of the union of the two natures, evidently appeared in the man Christ Jesus, yet certainly his divine nature was not circumscribed by the human, John iii. 13.

|| John xxi. 17.

¶ Mark xiii. 32.

‡ Luke v. 15. John v. 21. ** Matt. xxvi. 39.

lutely necessary, so far as I know, to procure the redemption and salvation of sinful men; for hereby an infinite value attended the obedience and sufferings of Christ. The one answered all the demands of the law, and the other procured a righteousness every way fit to recommend a true penitent to God. Now he can be just, while he justifies the true believer, and faithful to his most dreadful threats of vengeance, while he bestows grace and glory upon the most guilty sinners.

Having said a few things relating to the person of Christ, I proceed to give a brief view of his offices, as prophet, priest, and king; in the execution of which he effectually obtains eternal redemption for his people.

It is evident that sin has thrown a veil over the human understanding, so that it cannot see spiritual things in their native beauty and lustre. We are told in Corinthians *, that the natural man discerneth not the things of the Spirit of God, and that he cannot know them, because they are spiritually discerned. Saving knowledge lies beyond the human capacity, without divine instruction. Therefore that all men might not perish for lack of knowledge, Christ became a prophet, and teaches men those things whereby, if they are enabled to attend to them, they may be saved †. This great prophet is abundantly qualified for his office, for in him are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge ‡; and he is the only one that is qualified, for it is said, Neither knoweth

* 1 Cor. ii. 14. † Acts iii. 21. Heb. ii. 2. Luke xxiv. 45. ‡ Col. ii. 3.

knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him.

The condition of fallen man made it highly necessary that the gracious Mediator should become a priest, that he might make an atonement for him; for when we consider the nature of sin, the faithfulness of God to his word, and his infinite wisdom whereby he governs the intellectual world, it is not reasonable to suppose, that he would pass by sin, without satisfaction made to his inflexible justice. A government without laws, or any penalty annexed, or which does not regard the execution of that penalty, would be unworthy of man, much more of God, whose understanding and righteousness are without bounds or limitation. Sinful man must suffer then, or have one to suffer in his room. This Jesus has done in the execution of his priestly office*.

And as the priests under the Mosaic dispensation made intercession for those they offered sacrifices for, so Christ ever lives to make intercession for his people. This he does by presenting himself before the Lord as their friend and advocate†, and was typified by the high priest when he went into the holy of holies, bearing on his breast and shoulders the names of the twelve tribes of Israel||.

This intercessory work is farther carried on by his standing before God as a Lamb that had been slain, and exhibiting his blood and all his sufferings in behalf of miserable sinners, ruined and undone in and of themselves.

Some

* Heb. vii. 12, 13, 14.

† Heb. ix. 24.

|| Exod. xxviii. 9, 12, 28, 29.

Some suppose that he makes an oral intercession in heaven as he did on earth; and this their opinion is strengthened by Zech. i. 12, 13.

Our gracious intercessor, moreover, presents the prayers of the saints to his Father, and renders them acceptable by the sweet incense of his most acceptable mediation. And there was given unto him much incense, that he should offer it, with the prayers of all saints, upon the golden altar which was before the throne *.

I am next to treat of the kingly office of Christ. He is King of kings and Lord of lords; he sits as king on his holy hill of Zion. He is king of all the earth, and directs, overrules, and disposes of all things in the world in a gracious subordination to the good of all his faithful followers. As sovereign comptroller of the wills of men, he gives us safety amidst our most malignant adversaries. Some thoughts of Dr. Owen's, in his treatise on indwelling sin, may be proper here: " That
 " we are, says he, at peace in our houses, at
 " rest in our beds, that we have quiet in our
 " enjoyments, is from hence alone: we are
 " beholden to this providence of obstructing
 " sin, for our lives, our families, our estates,
 " our liberties, or whatsoever is or may be
 " dear to us. Some he cuts short in their
 " power; some he deprives of the instruments
 " whereby alone they can work; some he
 " prevents of their desired opportunities, or
 " diverts by other objects for their lusts; and
 " oftentimes causeth them to spend them
 " among

"among themselves, one upon another." Thus Christ rules in the midst of his and his people's enemies. But it is the exercise of his spiritual authority I would now a little consider. And this he displays when he casts down imaginations, and every thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and brings into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ*. As the sovereign of hearts, he makes people willing in the day of his power§. He gives laws to his subjects. Before he was taken up to the right hand of God, he gave commandments to his apostles||. We are exhorted to fulfil the law of Christ¶. Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ. He pardons their sins†. The Son of man hath power to forgive sins. And he will give a gracious, a glorious, and an eternal reward to all his faithful followers. Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life**.

But it is high time to give an account of some special benefits, which are and shall be bestowed upon the ransomed of the Lord in time and to all eternity, through the mediation of Christ Jesus, and which we ought to be well acquainted with. And that which first presents itself to us, is union with Christ.

There is a real, though inexplicable oneness between Christ and his members. I in them, says he‡‡; and they are said to be in him§§. But of him ye are in Christ Jesus. This union, though it is not with the essence of Christ, yet

* 2 Cor. x. 5.

§ Psal. cx. 3.

|| Acts i. 2.

¶ Gal. vi. 2.

† Matt. ix. 6.

** Rev. ii. 10.

‡‡ John xvii. 23.

§§ 1 Cor. i. 30.

it is more than an ideal or moral union. It is such a conjunction of the soul with Christ, as secures all needful grace here, and eternal glory hereafter. By virtue of this union it is, that because he lives, his people shall live also *. So long as there is life and grace in Christ, they shall never die. He is the head from which his whole body receives supplies, which will effectually secure every member from everlasting destruction.

We are indebted to the adorable Saviour for effectual calling. It is a spiritual blessing in Christ, which is bestowed upon true Christians; and, indeed, it is attributed to him by St. Paul †; Among whom ye also are the called of Christ Jesus. This internal call includes in it, repentance towards God, a lively faith in Christ, with the sanctification of all the powers and faculties of the soul. When a person is favoured with this call, an universal change takes place in the judgment, will, and affections of the called person.

Justification is a benefit derived from Christ. Being justified freely by his grace, through the redemption which is in Christ ‖; and the apostle says §, Being justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. This justification includes the pardon of sin, and the imputation of Christ's perfect obedience, who was made sin for his people, that they might be made the righteousness of God in him. St. Paul relied alone for his acceptance with God upon this righteousness ¶. Not hav-

* John xiv. 19.

† Rom. i. 6.

‖ Rom. iii. 24.

§ Rom. v. 9.

¶ Phil. iii. 9.

ing mine own righteousness which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ.

Adoption, which is God's taking persons into the number of his children and under his fatherly care and protection, bestowing upon them the rich communications of his Spirit, and indulging them with all the privileges of the sons of God, is for the sake of Christ*: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will.

The purifying influences of the divine Spirit, whereby real Christians are sanctified and made meet for the inheritance of the saints in light, are the fruits of Christ's mediation §; And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth.

True believers are sometimes indulged with the peace of God which passeth all understanding, which keeps their hearts and minds; but this most delightful advantage is through Christ Jesus ||. Have you, O Christian, at any time, this peace of God, which consists in a soul-refreshing sense of your interest in the divine favour, and in the hope of the eternal enjoyment of the divine presence, and which passeth all understanding, which you cannot fully conceive of, sufficiently value, nor justly represent? If you have this peace keeping your mind calm and serene, securing you from complying with surrounding temptations and sinking under the troubles of life, adore the

* Eph. i. 5. § John xvii. 19. || Phil. iv. 7.

the Prince of peace, through whom this blessedness is bestowed upon you.

Perseverance in the Christian life, amidst all the perils which are thickly spread over this sinful and wretched world, is owing to the gracious interposition of Christ in the Christian's favour *; And I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand.

The faithful servants of God are indebted to the Lord of life and glory for an entrance into his everlasting kingdom. Had it not been for him, instead of the narrow way, there would have been no way that leads to eternal life. The blessed Redeemer, on account of what he has done and suffered, claims heaven for his people, as a just debt due to himself †; Father, I will, that those also whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory.

The same almighty arm which brought salvation will put the crown of glory on the head of the victorious saint §: and we may observe, that the ransomed of the Lord in heaven, with the most affectionate gratitude celebrate the praises of Christ, for bringing them there ||.

The resurrection at the last day, and that happy change which will take place in the bodies of those who died in the Lord, will be effected by the power and grace of him who is mighty to save ¶; who will change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby

* John x. 28. † John xvii. 9. § 2 Tim. iv. 8.
|| Rev. v. 9, 10. ¶ Phil. iii. 21.

whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself.

To close this head, I would only add, that the final and inconceivable happiness of the saints, which will endure as long as there is a God, to make them happy, will be for the sake of Christ *; But the gift of God is eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Having thus given you a view of the person and offices of Christ, and some of the benefits which he confers on his redeemed people, I proceed

II. To point out the saving knowledge of Christ, which is knowledge attended with a special appropriation of Christ to the soul. The knowledge, says St. Paul, of Christ Jesus my Lord.

A man may be acquainted with all the fore-mentioned things, and yet be a stranger to Christ, and have no interest in the blessings which result from his mediation. Diabolical spirits have a deep insight into divine truths; they know them, and believe them; and many an unsanctified man is stored with evangelical knowledge. But this may be of no other use than to swell his pride, increase his guilt, and add to the weight of his final sentence in the great day of retribution. If the mere knowledge of sacred truths could procure salvation, the way to heaven would be much more populous than it is; for men are more inclined to furnish their minds with knowledge, than to live and walk as becomes the gospel of Christ.

I may

* Rom. vi. 23.

I may moreover venture to affirm, that Christian knowledge, with a mere external conformity to the duties of religion, will not bring a man to heaven. A man may do much, and know more, and yet be unacquainted with that faith which is of the operation of God, which works by love, and purifies the heart. True religion is deeply rooted in the soul, and produces the genuine fruits of holiness: and should a man have all knowledge, and all faith, without this, they will profit him nothing.

The knowledge which the apostle had of Christ, and which he intended in my text, I apprehend includes hearty affection for him, firm dependance upon him, with a sincere desire to do his will and to be transformed into his likeness. Whoever is thus acquainted with Christ on earth, shall enjoy him for ever in heaven.

The following things I apprehend are included in the saving knowledge of Christ, so highly prized by the apostle, as to call it the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus his Lord.

1. The Christian is made deeply sensible of the absolute need he stands in of an interest in Christ. As a man almost starved, knows that he wants food; as a man under sentence of condemnation, knows that he wants a pardon; so an enlightened convinced sinner knows that he must be for ever undone, unless he is found in Christ. He knows that he is under the curse of a broken law, he dreads the vengeance of an offended God, and is persuaded that Jesus is the only deliverer from the wrath

to

to come, and he therefore cannot be satisfied without some comfortable hope of a share in the blessed fruits of his mediation. His cry is, Lord save or I perish. Now behold he prays, and as his fears increase, he prays the more earnestly. Though Christ and salvation were little to him before, now nothing in the world can give him satisfaction but an hope of pardon. The anxiety and fervour of such an one as this may be represented by the conduct of the jailor we read of in Acts xvi. 29, 30; He sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved?

2. He has an unusual sight of the excellency and sufficiency of Christ as a Saviour. He is convinced that in him is a fulness of righteousness and strength, that he is just such a friend as he stands in need of, one capable of making him comfortable here, and happy to all eternity. In his view he is the most amiable object in heaven and on earth, a pearl so rich that he would gladly part with all that he might call him his own, and say with propriety and truth, This is my beloved, and this is my friend.

3. He has some acquaintance with his grace, and a little hope that he is willing to accept of him, notwithstanding he is in himself a vile hell-deserving sinner. This doubtless St. Paul had, or he would not have so extolled nor so affectionately set forth the excellency of the knowledge of Christ. He knew that there was liberty for sinners, weary and heavy laden, to go to him for peace and rest, and that who-
ever

ever did should meet with a most hearty welcome. Unless a person has some persuasion of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, his knowledge of him will not be attended with love, or do him any good. But it appears to him an undoubted truth, that he is both able and willing to save to the very uttermost all that come unto God by him. Hereupon

4. He accepts of Christ as his Lord and Saviour; and though perhaps he cannot enjoy the full sweets of propriety, and say with the most pleasing assurance, *My Lord*; yet he can say, *My Lord*, as he is the object of his most deliberate choice, the foundation of his hope, and the ruler and governor of his heart and actions. Herein differs the saving knowledge of Christ from that which is merely notional, and sound with graceless persons. These may like to speculate on Christ, to understand many things relating to him, to converse about him, and dispute for him, when they neither heartily trust him as a Saviour, nor humbly submit to him as their Lord and lawgiver. But the Christian indeed feels himself weary, and goes to him that he may find rest for his soul; he sees himself in danger, and flies to him for safety, that he may be sheltered from that storm of divine fury which will shortly fall on the guilty heads of all christless impenitent sinners. Moreover

5. The Christian indeed not only wants to know something of the person of Christ, and the mysteries of grace and salvation by him, but to be well furnished with the knowledge of his will with respect to his duty to God. His most

most sincere language is, What I know not, that do thou teach me! Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? Order my steps according to thy word, teach me thy way, and lead me in thy truth, and enable me to walk therein to the end of my life. May I be thy humble, obedient, and faithful servant on earth, and when I have served my generation according to the will of God, may I join the spirits of just men made perfect in heaven.

6. And in the last place here. In a true, spiritual, and saving knowledge of Christ are included fellowship and communion with him. Whatever cast of enthusiasm this may have in the view of some, all that they can say against it only proves, that they are unacquainted with real vital religion. The holy scriptures and the experience of those who are really pious confirm this truth. In Solomon's Song * the church is represented as saying, I sat under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste. Does not this point out the spiritual intercourse between Christ and his people? And does not St. John expressly say †, Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ? We receive celestial blessings from them, and hold spiritual and soul-refreshing communion with them. We are indulged with an earnest of the inheritance of the saints in light, and by the manifestations of divine love we have a foretaste of eternal felicity. Many gracious souls who walk conscientiously before God, know what this means, agreeable to St. John's words,

* Chap. ii. 3.

† 1 John i. 3.

words *; If we walk in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another.

That excellent man Mr. John Janeway, Fellow of King's College in Cambridge, knew to a great degree what communion with Christ is; for a little before his death he broke out in such words as these: "O he is come! he is come! O how sweet, how glorious is the blessed Jesus! How shall I do to speak the thousandth part of his praises! O for words to set out a little of his excellency! But it is inexpressible! O how excellent, glorious, and lovely is the blessed Jesus! He is sweet, he is altogether lovely! And now I am sick of love. He hath ravished my soul with his beauty! I shall die sick of love. O that you did but see and feel what I do! Come and behold a dying man, more chearful than ever you saw an healthful man in the midst of his sweetest enjoyments!"

The Lord grant that you and I, in the rich experience of this communion with Christ may quit these bodies of sin and death, and in the triumphs of faith enter into his glory! It is no wonder that those who experience these things, count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus their Lord. I would now

III. Endeavour to set forth the superior excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus.

And its eminence appears from the estimation of the apostle, who in this case was an infallible judge. He could appropriate many things to himself which were very valuable, and yet pours contempt upon them all when compared with the knowledge of Christ. And this he did upon mature study, and an exact calculation of the value of other things. He preferred the knowledge of Christ to the reputation of his birth, though he was of the tribe of

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Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews: to the privileges of the Jewish church, and to all his learning and personal religion.

The superexcellency of the knowledge of Christ will appear if we compare it with the world's darling *Trinity*, riches, honours, and pleasures. Were a man as rich as Cræsus, his treasures could not afford him that consolation which is found with those who have a saving acquaintance with Christ. Money and possessions may screen a man from some temporal evils which otherwise he would be exposed to, but they will stand him in no stead in the awful hour of death and dreadful day of judgment*.

Carnal pleasures are very sweet to the sensitive taste, but the most brilliant hours will be followed with the dismal shades of gloomy reflections and the blackness of darkness for ever. I have often thought of the dying words of the emperor Adrian: "Alas! my soul, said he, thou pleasing companion of my body, thou fleeting thing that art now deserting it, whither art thou flying, to what unknown region! Thou art all trembling, fearful, and pensive. Now what is become of thy former wit and humour! Thou shalt jest and be gay no more!" Had this monarch sought an acquaintance with Christ with as much eagerness as he did the delights of sense, his soul would have taken a more pleasing leave of his body.

If we think of the esteem of men and honours bestowed upon us by our fellow creatures, what are these to the knowledge of Christ? Were every tongue devoted to our praise, yet if we live and die strangers to Christ, our sun will set in perpetual obscurity.

All our moral and religious duties are nothing when compared with the knowledge of Christ. It

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* Job. xxxvi, 18, 19.

is undoubtedly our duty to aim at the most exalted piety, and press forward towards perfection; but when we have done all we can, we should look upon ourselves as unprofitable servants, and expect future happiness for the alone sake of the blood and righteousness of the Lord Jesus *.

Blessed Paul sought acceptance with God on the alone account of what Christ had done †. And he found in him, not having mine own righteousness which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith.

All human knowledge bears no proportion either in excellency or usefulness to the knowledge of Christ. I own the knowledge of nature has its advantages, and is very pleasing to some minds, and raises them far above many of their own species. They peep into a world unknown to multitudes of their fellow mortals, and enjoy such refined delight and satisfaction as others are unacquainted with; but all the acquisitions of the most exalted geniuses bear no more proportion to the knowledge of Christ than an atom to the terraqueous globe, and must be looked upon as loss when compared with the excellency of this knowledge. Such indeed is the superior greatness of the knowledge of Christ, that all human science appears contemptible when compared with it.

Human knowledge may lie in vast abundance in an unsanctified understanding; many very learned are very wicked men; and it is sometimes the case, that those who know most of the works of God have the least persuasion of the reality of his existence, and are the greatest enemies to his word. But the true knowledge of Christ, as it is from above and conveyed to the soul by the Spirit of God, is attended

* Eph. xxi, 8, 9, 10.

† Phil. iii. 9.

attended with a transforming power upon every heart which is the seat of it, or where it resides.

Human knowledge is not so boundless and unfathomable as the knowledge of Christ. Were the capacities of men more enlarged, and their lives drawn out to a greater length, perhaps they would want more created objects to exercise their reason and enquiries upon:—but in Christ there is enough to feed the contemplations of the most exalted mind to the countless ages of eternity; there will always be the *unsearchable* riches of Christ.

Human knowledge is not so entertaining and delightful as the knowledge of Christ. A Christian when meditating on the person, the offices, and benefits of Christ, under the influences of the blessed Spirit, finds an unparalleled sweetness in him. Christ calls his flesh meat indeed, and his blood drink indeed. The doctrine of Christ and him crucified is most pleasant, profitable, and delightful to a real Christian; whereas other knowledge, when compared with this, is dry, husky, and insipid. When we earnestly apply ourselves to the knowledge of Christ, we dig in the rich mines of grace, and among the springs of the most soul-refreshing consolation, and at times, with joy draw water out of the wells of salvation.

The knowledge of Christ is the most advantageous knowledge, when it is derived from the teachings of that good Spirit which Christ promised should take of his things and shew them to his faithful followers. Natural knowledge has often been, through human depravity, very unfriendly to true religion. The world by wisdom knew not God. The preaching of the cross was foolishness to the learned Greeks. And it is often the case, that unsanctified knowledge puffeth up. It is fuel which inflames pride, and tempts men to look down with contempt

contempt upon many sacred truths and the professors of them. They are disinclined to believe doctrines which they cannot explain, and no article must stand upon their creed which is not upon a level with their understanding. I own we should call no man master upon earth, nor give up our faith to mere human authority; yet whatever is plainly revealed in the holy bible, though we cannot explain the mystery which may be wrapped up in it, we should not refuse our assent to it upon that account, but imitate St. Paul, who when he was upon a subject which over-reached his reason, and was to him inexplicable, instead of with-holding his belief, he cries out *, O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! Such a disposition as this is found more or less with all those who have an experimental knowledge of Christ. They give up their judgments to the dictates of heaven, and yield up their souls to the obedience of faith, which is often attended with peace and joy in believing. And they need not doubt of an abundant entrance being ministered to them into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ, where their faith shall be exchanged for sight, and their hope for eternal enjoyment. There the veil which was upon their understandings shall be laid aside, and they shall see as they are seen, and know as they are known.

I shall now close with some improvement of this great, noble, and most important subject.

1. Is the Lord Jesus Christ God and man in the same person? I behold him as such in the glass of the divine word, and think I have thereby made it evident that he is so. Let us then most heartily give unto this our Lord the glory due unto his name.

* Rom. xiii. 33.

name. ¶ He thought it no robbery to be equal with God*; let us not then be guilty of so enormous a depredation as not to allow him that equality. It is no small crime to deprive a *man* of his good name, or of any part of his property, but the offence must rise to an amazing height when we depreciate the supreme excellency of Christ our Lord. Might not he in this case say, as in Malachi iii. 8, Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. Some may, like those mentioned in the latter part of this verse, say, wherein have we robbed thee? They think that if they acknowledge Christ to be the most excellent creature they do him no injustice. And I doubt not but they sincerely apprehend that they have clear scripture authority for this opinion. I own many passages may be produced out of the sacred volume which express great inferiority. Christ says himself, My Father is greater than I. But let it be considered that in the person of the adorable Jesus are two natures, one created and the other uncreated, which I humbly think I have made appear in the beginning of this discourse. So that things which infinitely differ may be said of him. We may affirm that he was born of a virgin, and as truly say that he gave birth to the universe: For by him were all things made that were made †.

O Sirs! let me intreat you not to suffer the condescension of the Lord of glory to tempt you to deny him the honours which he justly claims. How shocking is the thought of trampling upon him, because he stooped so low as to take our nature,
 ¶ Phil. ii. 6. that

* Notwithstanding the dust raised by some criticks to obscure the glory of Christ in this text, the translation, it is well known, is perfectly literal, nor is there any reason for altering it, but that, as it now stands, it is a clear proof of the eternal Godhead of the incarnate Saviour.

† John i. 3.

that he might offer it up to make an atonement for the sins of men.

Search the scriptures afresh with unbiassed minds, pray earnestly for the illumination of the unerring Spirit, and perhaps you may put forth the hand of faith and say with St. Thomas, who was much indisposed to believe, MY LORD AND MY GOD!

2. Upon the representation that has been given of the saving knowledge of Christ, let me persuade you to search your hearts, and see whether you are acquainted with it or not. Have you been deeply convinced of your need of Christ? Have you beheld him as an able and sufficient Saviour, and one that is very merciful and gracious to lost miserable sinners? Have you accepted of him, and ventured to rely alone upon him for your salvation? Have you yielded up yourselves to the dictates of his will, and to be transformed into his likeness? And have you tasted any sweetness in fellowship with Christ? If this has been your experience, you are acquainted with the excellency of the knowledge of Christ; you are not enlightened hypocrites, but Christians indeed, and furnished with that good part which shall never be taken from you. Through the struggles of indwelling sin, and temptations which arise from the world and the devil, your evidences for glory may be clouded, and you may fear that you shall never arrive at the celestial kingdom, but depend upon it this shall not be your case; for when you are ready to sink like Peter, the Lord Jesus, who has said My sheep shall never perish, will stretch forth his hand and save you.

3. If there are superior excellencies which attend the knowledge of Christ, it is worthy of your highest esteem and most eager pursuit. What time, pains, and money do many spend to acquire the knowledge of tongues and sciences, when they afford but a very imperfect satisfaction, and are lost in

in death; for whether there be tongues they shall cease, whether there be knowledge it shall vanish away*. The supercilious scholar should think of this and be humble; for as the rich will shortly be on a level with the poor, so the man who is the most largely stored with human literature will soon have no eminence above his untaught neighbours. But the knowledge of Christ ennobles the meanest person. I will set him on high, because he has known my name†. It affords the most refined pleasure, and is connected with endless felicity. It is life eternal to know Jesus Christ‖. Human knowledge may make a man a fine gentleman, and recommend him to the esteem and admiration of his fellow mortals; but the experimental knowledge of Christ changes the soul into his likeness, and prepares it for the full enjoyment of the divine presence in the world of glory. May the Father of mercies and the God of all consolations grant, that grace here and endless peace hereafter may be multiplied to us, through the knowledge of Jesus our Lord! Amen§.

* 1 Cor. xiii. 8. † Psalm xci. 14. ‖ John xvii. 3.
§ 2 John i. 12.

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